DARA BIRNBAUM: EXPLODING THE IMAGE

MICHAEL NEWMAN

Stills from *Attack Piece*, 1975.

I want to follow a thread through certain works by Dara Birnbaum, one that leads from the early installation *Attack Piece* (1975), in which media are directly related to the performance of the body, to the more recent projected-image and sound installation *Erwartung/Expectancy* (1995/2001), which is based on a libretto that uses the language of a hysteric. In between those two points, this line passes through the videos *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978–79), which appropriates footage from a television series, and the *Damnation of Faust Trilogy* (1983–87), in which specially shot footage is edited to transform the space and time of the image. The thread is not so different from that of Ariadne, in that Birnbaum's work, in its variety, forms something of a maze, and that what is confronted therein entangles love and violence in a way that refers to society's distribution of goods, sexualities, and power. Media in her work become not so much the physical or material bases for representations as modes of passage that explore articulations of inside and outside, as well as the liminal in-between where transformation may be stalled or enabled.

I

In *Attack Piece*, we see an interaction between an individual and a group that has a dimension of anxiety and violence while also possessing the underlying structure of a game. On a lawn outside a building, a woman—in this case Birnbaum herself—is "attacked" by one person after the other, each of whom aims to film her using a Super 8 camera.[1] Meanwhile she "defends" herself with a 35 mm still camera. The work, which was first shown in 2002, is presented with the moving and still images facing each other either on two monitors or as projections.

In *Attack Piece*, the film camera takes an aggressive role, almost that of a rapist. The aim of the game is for the person holding the film camera to close in on the woman holding the still camera. That the woman has only a still camera is described in the instructions as putting her at a disadvantage, and in addition, we read that she is to be blindfolded, although in the resulting film she appears to attempt to keep her eyes closed. But as a defense the still camera does perform two functions: first, it creates distance; second, it "freezes" the attacker. The mise-en-scène recalls Dan Graham's *Body Press* (1970–72), which installs as two silent 16 mm film projections the results of a naked man and woman each passing a film camera around their body within a mirrored cylinder. While Graham's work implies a utopian equality between the man and the woman as subjects and objects of the look, *Attack Piece*, by placing a woman in the position of "defender" and distinguishing sex from the gendered implications of the technology, since both men and women perform as "attackers,"

emphasizes the asymmetry of the situation, the imbalance of power and the inequality of access to media. Some of the resulting still photographs resemble war photography, such as the famous 1936 picture by Robert Capa of the death of a Loyalist soldier in the Spanish Civil War, which shocks because of the closeness of the representation to the violence and death that it depicts.

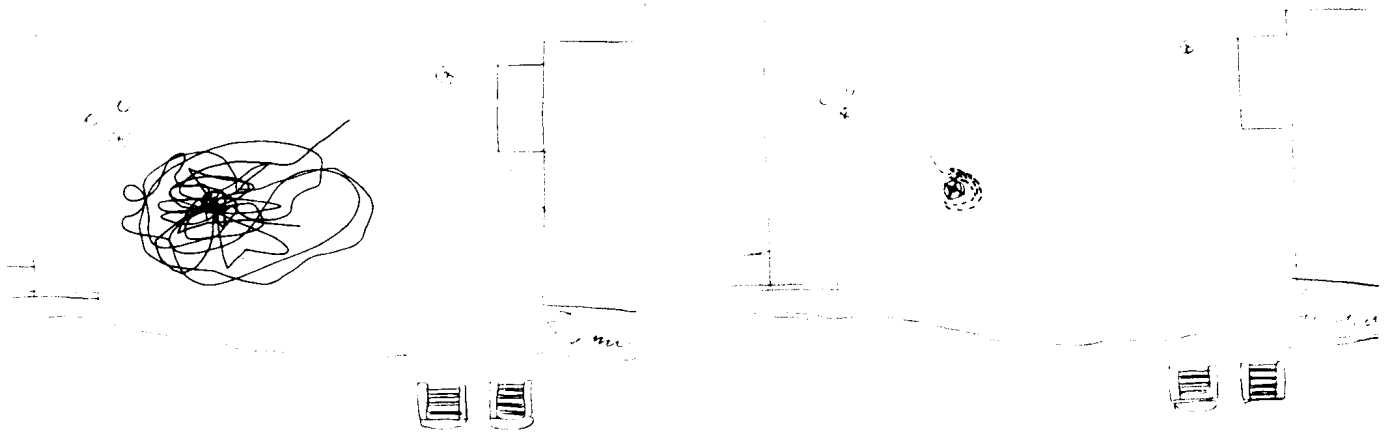
Attack Piece works on the intersection of psychology and technology, as movie and still camera are instruments of, respectively, aggression and defense, the wider angle and prefocus of the former facilitating movement and a more inclusive view, while the latter required its user to intuitively focus in anticipation of the aggressor's movements. Relationships of aggression and defense are mediated though technology but are not subsumed to spectacle. Instead, individual agency is involved, while the technology of the respective cameras determines possibilities. Rather than merely documenting a performance, the technological means of representation here become, as with the early videos of Vito Acconci, part of the performance itself. Furthermore, the historicity of media is folded into Birnbaum's 2002 installation of *Attack Piece*, through the use of sound: while the presentation comprises two facing digital projections, the images are accompanied by a loud sound track of the now-absent film and slide projectors. Digital media holds the memory of the analog media in which the work was originally made; this, in turn, underscores the way in which the present form of the work also stands as a representation of a previous historical moment with its critical and utopian dimensions.

Still from Dan Graham, *Body Press*, 1970–72.

Robert Capa, *The Fallen Soldier*, 1936.

The scenario of *Attack Piece* will be found again in *Technology/Transformation*, where once more a woman will fend off an attack, only there with the psychological and physical dimension of mediums inflected by the generic dimension of mass media, specifically by the representation of the superhero on television. A subsequent series of videos, *Damnation of Faust Trilogy*, which moves away from appropriation to footage shot and edited by the artist, explores the relationship between the anticipation of a life to come by young people first encountered playing in a playground and their later experiences of separation and loss, which open up a reflective, melancholy dimension of personal and political retrospection. The model of opera, alluded to in the title of *Damnation of Faust Trilogy*, will be extended in *Erwartung/ Expectancy*, which examines the conditions for the appearance of an excess associated with both feminine madness and *jouissance* (enjoyment).

Before discussing these works, however, it is useful to consider early experimental performance videos by Birnbaum that anticipate some of the later works' motifs.



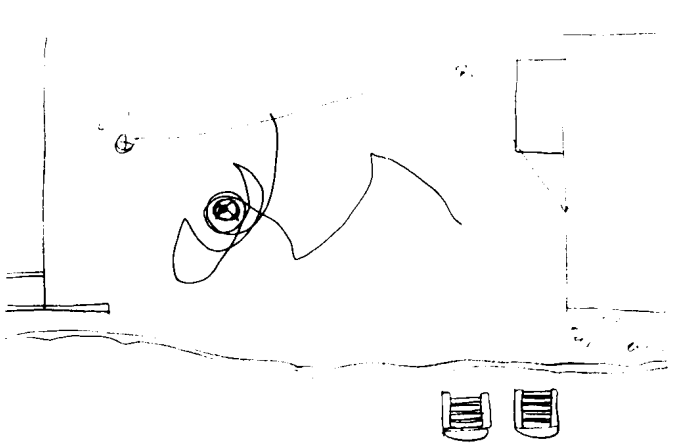
Drawings for *Attack Piece*, 1975.

II

Birnbaum's initial approach to video was to use it to document the performance of her own body. The apparent immediacy of video—its ability to provide a moving image contemporaneous with what it is an image of, and therefore also provide instant feedback—made it seem, in its early historical context, that video might enable a presentation of the Real of the body in "real time."[2] What Birnbaum's experimental videos document, however, is less the Real of the body as such than the realization that the presentation in moving image is always already doubled by a re-presentation. To engage with and reflect on this dimension of re-presentation, Birnbaum folded it back into the video itself. We thus find the dimensions of mirror reflection and projection staged in the videos themselves, ruining their initial immediacy and opening the dimension of allegory—of the image standing for something other than itself—that will be taken up in her videos appropriating clips from television.

Various aspects of *Technology/Transformation* are foreshadowed by Birnbaum's early series of performance experiments. In *Chaired Anxieties* (1975), she performs with a chair, first in pants (*Abandoned*), then in a skirt (*Slewed*). The videos combine the studio performance of Bruce Nauman's early videos with the forced intimacy of Vito Acconci's. The camera is low, as if it is trying to look up her skirt, and therefore aggressive, like the film camera of *Attack Piece*. She responds both defensively and aggressively. The division of these first sequences into one in which she is wearing pants and one where she is dressed in a skirt seems almost to anticipate the two aspects of the feminine that appear in *Technology/Transformation*, the secretary and the superhero, but with important differences, too. In *Slewed*, Birnbaum becomes increasingly sexual, panting and moving rhythmically and, because she is not wearing underwear, exposing her genitals to the camera. Yet it seems more like a fight than a seduction. Wonder Woman does battle, too, but her transformation is not into the exposed, openly sexual being of this video. Rather she turns into a fetish-body.

Still from *Chaired Anxieties: Slewed*, 1975.



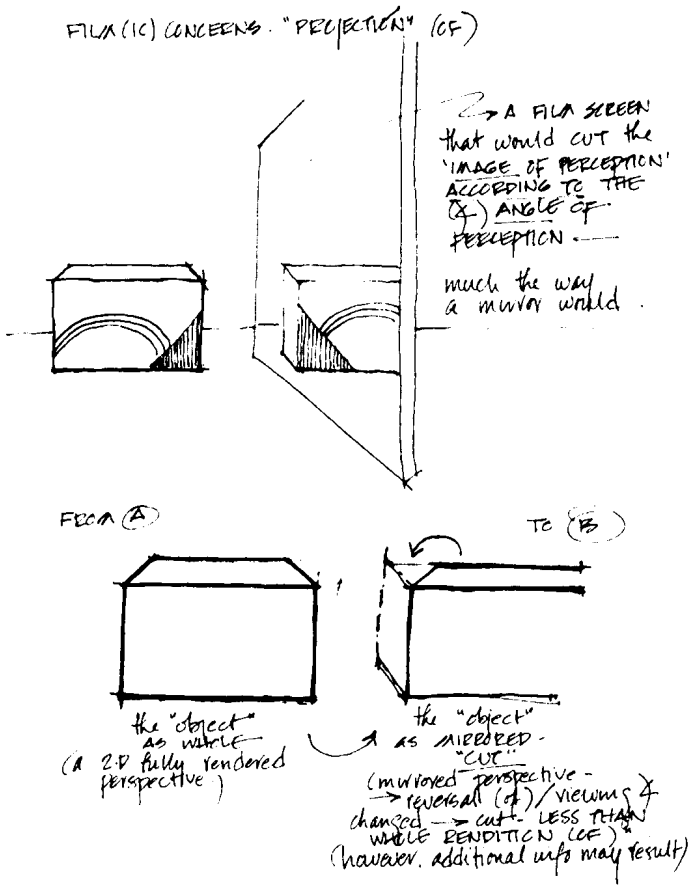
In another early video, *Mirroring* (1975), Birnbaum performs between the camera and a mirror. Sometimes we see her face, at others her face and a reflection; in addition, her face goes into and out of focus, so that we become aware of the mediated character of her image. If video as a medium was initially welcomed for its seeming immediacy, the instantaneous production of the image drew attention to a homology to the only kind of image that is simultaneous with its referent other than a recorded moving image—namely, a mirror reflection. Artists from Acconci and Joan Jonas to Graham were quick to exploit this effect. The analogy between video and mirror prompted a famous critique of video art by critic and historian Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism." As she says of Acconci's *Centers* (1971), in which he points to the center of the video screen, it "was made by Acconci using the video monitor as a mirror."[1] Krauss extrapolates from the homology between video and mirror to the claim that narcissism is the true "medium" of video. She finds in the idea of a spiritualist medium—like the photographs that purportedly showed ectoplasm—a precedent that a psychological state, rather than a physical support, can be understood as a "medium." And she notes that most video art, whether on tape or in installation, uses the body in a circuit between camera and monitor:

Still from *Mirroring*, 1975.

> *Unlike the other visual arts, video is capable of recording and transmitting at the same time—producing instant feedback. The body is therefore as it were centered between two machines that are the opening and closing of a parenthesis. The first of these is the camera; the second is the monitor, which reprojects the performer's image with the immediacy of a mirror.* (Krauss, p. 181)

Of course, the closure that Krauss implies is questionable, not least since it assumes that the performance is for the one performing. Clearly, for most examples of performance-related video, and certainly for Birnbaum's experiments, the performance is taking place for or as a challenge to an Other, or a "gaze" that is not to be identified with the position assumed by the artist in the work, and may be a projected Other—the position of a superego, for example—as much as the actual others who will watch the tape. While no doubt evoking

Still from Vito Acconci, *Centers*, 1971.



Untitled drawing from a sketchbook, c. 1975.

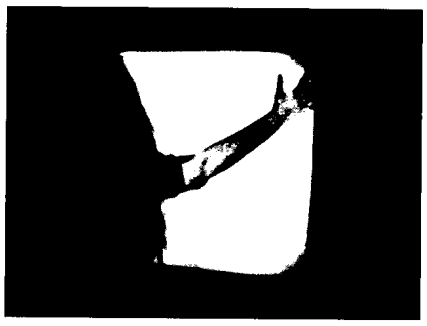
a narcissistic fantasy, the performance videos of the 1970s insinuate an otherness into the self-relation, and a trace of the nonpresent into the present.

It is by now a commonplace that the mass-media image functions as a mirror to reflect back to the viewer an ideal ego offering a fantasy of completion. This effect depends on the image being both the same as the ego and other than it: it's me, and it's more than me. By implying more than is reflected, the "mirror" becomes a "screen." Another early video, *Control Piece* (1975), involves an exploration of the relationship between the projection and the screen. It begins with the projection of a screen, into which the artist-performer's hand intervenes. In a second sequence, we see the projection of an image of a loft studio or gallery, into which the artist moves, so that her body itself becomes the screen for the projection. We thus have a development from the objective/subjective body in relation to the viewer as Other of *Chained Anxieties*, through the relation of the self to the mirror image and its dissolution in an out-of-focus blur in *Mirroring*, to the body as, at once, screen for the image and stain or disruption in relation to it in *Control Piece*. The shift is from a projection of the cone of vision from the eye of the viewer, substituted for by the camera, to the subject's appearing in the projection that comes from elsewhere, yet that projection is also disrupted or interrupted. The subject has changed from presumptively occupying the place of origin to herself becoming a screen. Furthermore, the mirror has been replaced by the screen. Whereas a mirror reflects precisely what is in front of it—like its tain, its stain is invisible—the screen suggests a behind that it covers. *Technology/Transformation* will take up precisely this play between mirror and screen.

III

Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman is a work about stalled transitions and a momentary in-between. According to notes made by Birnbaum at the time, it was to be one of four videos dealing with superheroes on prime-time TV series, the others, which were never made, being drawn from *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and *The Bionic Woman*.[4] Birnbaum saw all of them as having to do with relations between technology and biology, in a context that saw both technological advances that could be used for human betterment and the use of technology and biology in warfare. Like Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), which was first published in English translation in 1972, Birnbaum's plan was to explore the entwinement of progress and regression, science and mythology, and utopia and destruction—in her case by appropriating and manipulating footage from these popular TV series.[5] In *Technology/Transformation*, the moment of potential change, emancipation, and explosive pleasure is recuperated into an image of fetishistic stasis.

The video begins with a repeated explosion that fills the screen. We then see the transformation of the female character, Diana Prince, from an ordinary woman who spins on her heels into a superhero. Birnbaum edits the video so that the spin is repeated a few times, along with its flash of white light and siren blast, as if she is stuck for a moment, until the change is completed. Then Wonder Woman is shown running through the woods, to the accompaniment of the series's theme music, again repeated several times before returning to the repeated spin, when we hear the words "Wonder Woman" sung over and over again, like a record that is skipping. The second transition occurs in a room with mirrored walls and infinite reflections. Wonder Woman cuts a doorway into the mirror, an act repeated with its excruciating sound three times, so that what would otherwise seem effortless appears full of anxiety. Then the transition from a woman in black evening clothes to Wonder Woman is performed and repeated. Thereafter she passes through the wall, meeting a man to whom she says, "We've got to stop meeting like this!"—as if to draw attention to the inversion of the "normal" relation between men and women in a fictional world where a woman can assume supernatural powers. While the man hides behind a concrete pillar, Wonder Woman fends off bullets with her bracelets. The video concludes with repeated clips of Wonder Woman running through a wasteland and spinning amid trees—although she fails to make the transition back to the "everyday" woman—until the repeating explosion from the beginning fills the screen again, accompanied by disco music, to be replaced by the words of a Wonder Woman song scrolling up a blue screen in time to the music.



Still from *Control Piece*, 1975.

While *Technology/Transformation* works effectively without any direct knowledge of its sources, some consideration of the relation to the *Wonder Woman* TV episode will provide an additional perspective. The clips of the *Wonder Woman* TV series that Birnbaum appropriates come from episode five of the third season, entitled "Disco Devil," aired on October 20, 1978. A nerdy man in a disco is taken by a beautiful hostess to an upstairs private room, which has its walls covered in mirrors creating infinite reflections, and left alone there. In comes a man wearing a white suit—he is reminiscent of John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*, which opened the previous year—who appears to hypnotize the nerd by dancing. Wonder Woman then performs, in the title sequence, various feats of strength and agility and demonstrates her spinning transformation. The scene changes to that of a test for a detonator of nuclear missiles. The person we saw being hypnotized, who turns out to be a nuclear engineer, arrives in a rush to halt the detonation process, but he has forgotten the combination. Diana Prince, an intelligence agent, has been watching the test, and as the men take shelter in a bunker, she transforms into Wonder Woman to throw the detonator far away, where it explodes harmlessly. This is the explosion repeated in *Technology/Transformation*, which at the time might have been associated with the threat of nuclear war. We return to the disco and discover that the hypnotizing dancer—Nick Marino—has stolen part of the engineer's memory. Prince locates another man, Franklin, who is able to read minds but, not using his ability, has failed at a series of manual jobs. He is followed by one of the criminals and is invited to the disco—called the Styx (in Greek mythology forming the boundary with the underworld, where also to be found is the river of forgetfulness, Lethe) by the woman who brought in the engineer. Later, he and Prince are trapped by the criminals. While he is taken down to the garage, Prince escapes, transforms

Stills from *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, 1978–79.

into Wonder Woman, and protects him from their bullets with her bracelets (a clip used by Birnbaum). Franklin is hidden by the intelligence agency but is captured by the criminals and taken to the Styx, where the female boss decides to use him instead of Nick. Following him there, Prince repels the attentions of an overeager dancer and ends up in the mirrored room, where she transforms into Wonder Woman, cuts through a panel, and dives through the wall, discovering Franklin. (Birnbaum in *Technology/Transformation* inverts the cutting and the transformation in the mirrored room, disrupting the "logical" narrative sequence.) While Franklin neutralizes Nick's power, Wonder Woman deals with the gang leader and bends the pistol of the DJ. Nick, it turns out, has also forgone the memory that would have enabled him to identify Prince as Wonder Woman.

It is not difficult to see why this episode might have appealed to Birnbaum: in addition to the explosion, bullet-repelling, and mirror sequences, it contains the reference to disco that she will adopt for the rolling text that concludes *Technology/Transformation*. With the theme of memory theft, it suggests both a mind-controlling mass media and a countervailing "theft" of images, which artists such as Birnbaum herself were, at that very moment, performing. Moreover, Birnbaum was showing her videos using appropriated TV footage in New York nightclubs, so *Technology/Transformation* was effectively reinserted into the disco context that provided the inspiration for the TV show itself.

While *Technology/Transformation* draws from popular television (a context to which the artist had intended to return the work), it may also be compared to artworks. In its use of a comic-book character, *Technology/Transformation* alludes to Pop art. It is distinct, however, in its break from a straightforward aestheticizing of the mass image. Closest perhaps to Warhol in her use of the repetition of the mass-produced image and her interest in the modes of circulation and popularization of the image, Birnbaum aims not to submit the image to aesthetic contemplation but rather to provoke on the part of the viewer an analysis of the image (by repeating or slowing it) and a consideration of what it implies for the transformation of social and gender relations.[9] Further, *Technology/Transformation* also includes the critique of the conditions for any such realization in the way that the transitions are subject to repetition and failure. Yet neither does it negate the potential implied by both the unrepresentable quality evoked by the explosion, and by the ecstasy of the lyrics that close the work.

Around the period that *Technology/Transformation* was being made, Richard Prince was rephotographing advertising images from magazines, removing the words and putting the results into series of similar images. In 1977, Douglas Crimp curated the exhibition "Pictures" at Artists Space in New York, which included work by Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith, most of which was based on the reproduction or reworking in a different medium of already existing images and stereotypes.[8] At the time, this work tended to be seen as critiquing or deconstructing originality and expressive authorship, as well as, like Marcel Duchamp's readymade, drawing attention to the institutional context of art.[9] To a certain extent, such work followed Pop art in displacing images from the sphere of the circulation of images in mass media to that of the art world. By contrast, Birnbaum appropriated and manipulated clips from popular television, in such works as *Technology/Transformation, Art Break, MTV Networks, Inc.* (1987), and *TRANSVOICES: Transgressions* (1992), with the intention that they should reenter mass media and be shown on TV: "I decided to use the medium 'on itself,' rather than translating television imagery into a different form of presentation."[10] Accordingly, it was shown on Manhattan cable TV, programmed into the same time slot as the "real" *Wonder Woman* TV show, so that if viewers were channel surfing they might happen on both the original and Birnbaum's version. This approach foreshadowed that of artists of the first decade of the twenty-first century, such as Seth Price and Cory Arcangel, who appropriate digital material—images, sound, video clips—from the internet and return it to that same sphere, as well as showing it in art galleries.[10] *Technology/Transformation* was also shown on a TV monitor as part of a window installation at Sol Io Hi Hair Salon de Coiffure in New York, a display that associated the work with the way in which a window-shopper's self-image is reflected in the glass pane that separates him or her from the commodities inside. The violent dimension of a combination of sexual and commodity fetishism had been reflected in a contemporaneous work by Jeff Wall, the light-box transparency *The Destroyed Room* (1978), with its slashed mattress and scattered—or arranged—women's clothes and jewelry, which Wall showed in a gallery window in Vancouver as if it were a shopwindow.[11] Marcel Duchamp provided a model to both Birnbaum and Wall with his 1945 window display at Brentano's bookstore in New York for André Breton's book *Surrealism and Painting*. The later artists' shopwindow displays connect appropriation with the mechanisms by which desire is sutured to the commodity, and it is in these terms that the readymade tended to be interpreted at the time.

Through editing, Birnbaum places her emphasis on appropriation as a potential form of transformation, while also drawing attention to its blockage.[12] Jack Goldstein's films and vinyl records provided an important model for this approach to appropriated image and sound. *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer* (1975), a two-minute loop of the studio's logo of a roaring lion, above which appear the words *art gratia artis* against a red background reminiscent of Barnett Newman's painting *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950–51), suggests both the transformation of nature into corporate image and the assimilation of high art (represented by abstract painting) into mass media. Goldstein uses film to depict the becoming of the image: for the lion the image is a trap. In 1978 Goldstein made *The Jump*, a twenty-six-second somersault dive rotoscoped so that the body appears as red and orange stars extinguishing themselves in a dark void. The disappearance of the image—or into the void of the image—is

Multiple-generation photocopy of Wonder Woman comic-book page, from the archive of Dara Birnbaum.

Ms. magazine cover, July 1972.

Still from Jack Goldstein, *The Jump*, 1978.

also the extinction of the subject. Birnbaum's *Technology/Transformation* is also about the relation between the subject and the image: Diana Prince becomes the "image" of Wonder Woman through her spinning transformation (which is not to say that she is not already an image in the first place). But in doing so she passes through a moment of absolute dissolution, which ties together the flash and the explosion. As the theme-song lyrics make clear, this moment is one not of death—or not only of death—but of extreme, unrepresentable, unspeakable enjoyment or *jouissance*.[13] It's an enjoyment that does not last, since it is recuperated into the fetish image and the commodified forms of mass-cultural pleasure, such as disco.

While the image may be a commodity and therefore comparable to a commodity-object, it is at the same time something both other than and more than an object in the world. The image is simultaneously something mental and something outside the perceiving subject—capable, therefore, of becoming an outside-on-the-inside that possesses the subject in the paradoxical combination of taking the image in through its consumption and the very impossibility of its being appropriated in its combination of emptiness and excess. Indeed, *Technology/Transformation* could be read as an allegory of the simultaneous appropriation and failure of appropriation of the image, split as it is between its unrepresentable excess and its reduction to commodity. As in the episode of *Wonder Woman* from which it is taken, it is a matter of being possessed in the very attempt at possession. It would not be too far-fetched to compare *Technology/Transformation* to Duchamp's *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* (1912), as well as *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23). With their stalled consummations, these works combine the evocation of passage and transformation with a sense of frustration and impotence. *Technology/Transformation* is less pessimistic about access to excess—it is, after all, a work by a woman artist dealing with *jouissance* rather than a work by a male artist concerned with impotence—but more so about its blockage and diversion into mass entertainment in the context of the expansion of that domain and its absorption of art from the 1960s onward.

One dimension of the transformation of Wonder Woman is that she assumes power and agency—she becomes an active subject able to save the man, who, in the clip Birnbaum uses (as well as elsewhere in the series), is put in the passive position. The cost of assuming agency, and thereby taking on a threatening, masculine, phallic authority, is that she becomes a fetish. Wonder Woman appears doll-like and artificial, wearing a costume that emphasizes her breasts while protecting them with metallic bands like armor.[14] *Wonder Woman* may have been one of the so-called "jiggle shows" produced for TV, as a response to criticisms about violence on television, but it is also clearly a response to the rise of feminism.[15] Gloria Steinem used the image of Wonder Woman in July 1972 on the cover of the first issue of the feminist magazine *Ms.* Wonder Woman, according to the story laid out in the series, is the product of an all-female society: she is the daughter of the queen of the Amazons and comes from Paradise Island, inhabited only by women until a wounded pilot from the United States Air Force intelligence service washes up on their shore. She wins an athletic competition to take him back to Washington. Despite her alien origin, the red, white, and blue of her Wonder Woman costume emphasize that she is a patriotic American. Emerging

Multiple-generation photocopy of a video still from *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, 1978–79, from the archive of Dara Birnbaum.

from an exclusively female yet hierarchically monarchial provenance, she ends up serving, on the one hand, as a feminist inspiration and, on the other, as a sexual fetish and a nationalist emblem.

According to Sigmund Freud, "A fetish is a substitute for the woman's (mother's) phallus, which the little boy once believed in and which . . . he does not want to give up."[19] On perceiving that the mother doesn't have a penis, the little boy feels his own organ threatened, and with it the narcissism that constitutes his ego. The fetish serves simultaneously to acknowledge and to deny the lack of the maternal phallus: the child "both retains this belief, and renounces it." Freud also remarks that in later life, "an adult might experience a similar panic on hearing that king and country are in peril, and it will have similarly illogical consequences," making all the more plausible the combination in the figure of Wonder Woman, at the time of the Cold War, of both national and sexual fetish.

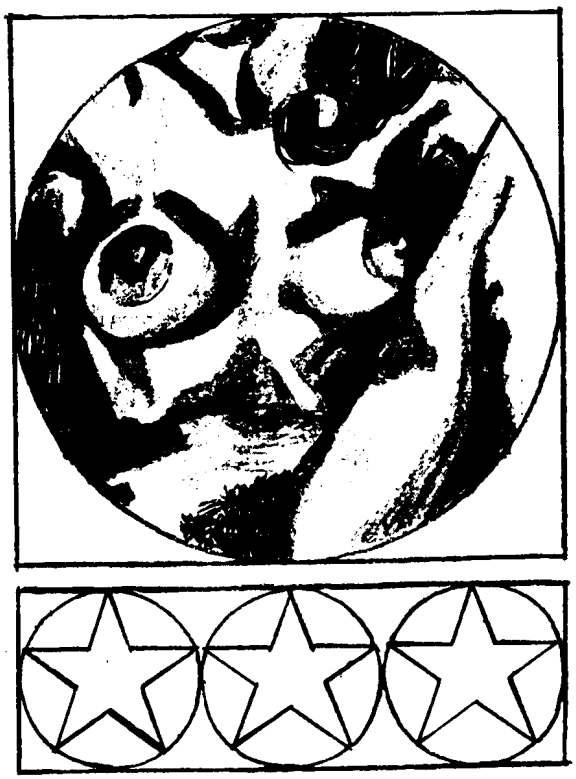
In psychoanalytic terms, the role of the fetish is to disavow lack and therefore difference. The fetishist fixates on something seen prior to the horrific discovery that the woman lacks a penis, thereby threatening the fetishist's possession of one. So fur (pubic hair), leather (skin), and shoes (feet) become typical fetish objects. Equally, the whole body of the woman may become a fetish through the way that it is adorned and rendered artificial, and that is the case with Wonder Woman. The castrating threat of the active woman—indeed, that of the postwar protofeminist—is simultaneously acknowledged and neutralized by her body being turned into a fetish.

The fetish is often something that is excessive in its tactility (fur, leather) or visuality (shiny plastic or metal). The example with which Freud begins his analysis is unusual, since the fetish in question has a linguistic as well as a metonymic dimension:

> *The most remarkable case in this respect was one in which a young man had elevated a certain "shine on the nose" into a fetishistic prerequisite. The surprising explanation for this was that the child had been brought up in England but had then come to Germany, where he almost completely forgot his native language. The fetish, which stemmed from earliest infancy, needed to be read not in German, but in English: the "shine* [Glanz] *on the nose" was actually a "glance at the nose," so the fetish was the nose—which, incidentally, he could endow at will with this particular sheen, invisible to others.* (p. 90)

Wonder Woman, once she has transformed, has many parts that are shiny and reflective, especially the bracelets with which she repels bullets. The explosions seem to herald a transition into a realm of altogether heightened visuality. Perhaps, after all, the fetish was nothing other than the "shine" itself, a secondary fetish that blindingly conceals the fetish that simultaneously acknowledges and disavows the lack. For Christian Metz, it is the very technique of cinema—those skills, procedures, and machines that enable the force of presence of the film to coexist with the absence on which it is constructed—that is the fetish:

> *As for the fetish itself, in its cinematic manifestations, who could fail to see that it consists fundamentally of the equipment of the cinema (= its "technique"), or of the cinema as a whole as equipment and as technique?*[17]



Untitled and undated lithograph, c. 1975.

The extension of fetishism to the technique of a medium is brought back to the question of gender by Laura Mulvey. She offers a reading of fetishism as a form of heightened visibility, citing the following passage from Dana Polan:

> *Mass culture becomes a kind of postmodern culture, the stability of social sense dissolved (without becoming any less ideological) into one vast spectacular show, a dissociation of cause and effect, a concentration on the allure of means and a concomitant disinterest in meaningful ends. Such spectacle creates the promise of a rich sight: not the sight of particular fetishized objects, but sight itself as richness, as the ground of extensive experience.*[18]

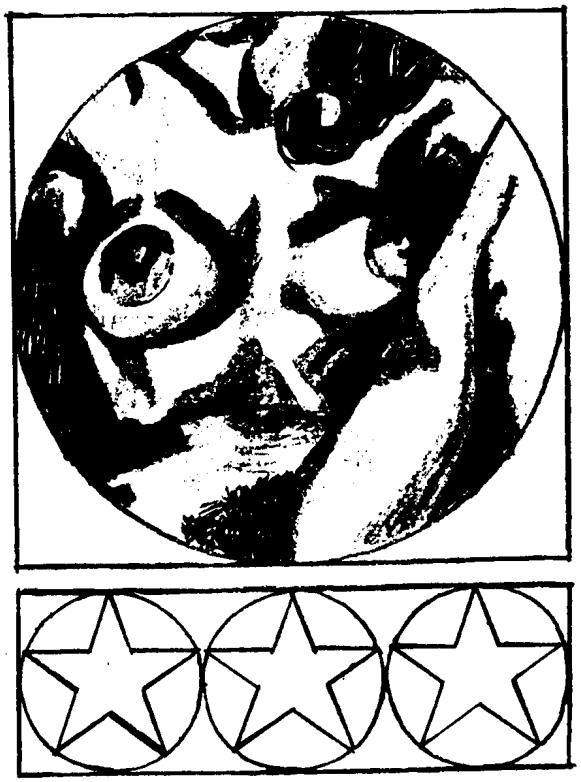
For Mulvey, this "rich sight" as an excessive visuality of surface becomes a fetishistic mask "disavowing the traumatic sight of nothing, and thus constructing phantasmatic space, a surface and what the surface might conceal" (p. 11). The glitter of this surface—we might think of Warhol here—is there "to hold the fetishist's eyes fixed on the seduction of belief to guard against the

The fetish is often something that is excessive in its tactility (fur, leather) or visuality (shiny plastic or metal). The example with which Freud begins his analysis is unusual, since the fetish in question has a linguistic as well as a metonymic dimension:

> *The most remarkable case in this respect was one in which a young man had elevated a certain "shine on the nose" into a fetishistic prerequisite. The surprising explanation for this was that the child had been brought up in England but had then come to Germany, where he almost completely forgot his native language. The fetish, which stemmed from earliest infancy, needed to be read not in German, but in English: the "shine* [Glanz] *on the nose" was actually a "glance at the nose," so the fetish was the nose—which, incidentally, he could endow at will with this particular sheen, invisible to others.* (p. 90)

Wonder Woman, once she has transformed, has many parts that are shiny and reflective, especially the bracelets with which she repels bullets. The explosions seem to herald a transition into a realm of altogether heightened visuality. Perhaps, after all, the fetish was nothing other than the "shine" itself, a secondary fetish that blindingly conceals the fetish that simultaneously acknowledges and disavows the lack. For Christian Metz, it is the very technique of cinema—those skills, procedures, and machines that enable the force of presence of the film to coexist with the absence on which it is constructed—that is the fetish:

> *As for the fetish itself, in its cinematic manifestations, who could fail to see that it consists fundamentally of the equipment of the cinema (= its "technique"), or of the cinema as a whole as equipment and as technique?*[17]



Untitled and undated lithograph, c. 1975.

The extension of fetishism to the technique of a medium is brought back to the question of gender by Laura Mulvey. She offers a reading of fetishism as a form of heightened visibility, citing the following passage from Dana Polan:

> *Mass culture becomes a kind of postmodern culture, the stability of social sense dissolved (without becoming any less ideological) into one vast spectacular show, a dissociation of cause and effect, a concentration on the allure of means and a concomitant disinterest in meaningful ends. Such spectacle creates the promise of a rich sight: not the sight of particular fetishized objects, but sight itself as richness, as the ground of extensive experience.*[18]

For Mulvey, this "rich sight" as an excessive visuality of surface becomes a fetishistic mask "disavowing the traumatic sight of nothing, and thus constructing phantasmatic space, a surface and what the surface might conceal" (p. 11). The glitter of this surface—we might think of Warhol here—is there "to hold the fetishist's eyes fixed on the seduction of belief to guard against the

encroachment of knowledge" (p. 12). She writes of "the magical sheen of the screen" that the 1960s and 1970s avant-garde took upon themselves to demystify. The critical turn of feminist film theory was to show how the disavowal of production (on which Metz based his theory of the cinematic fetish) was "complemented by the construction of an image that finds its ultimate realization in the eroticized feminine." In this way, the media image as commodity fetish, concealing its mode and relations of production, is supported by turning the feminine body into a fetish. This whole process is condensed in the caption Birnbaum applied to a sequence of images of *Technology/Transformation* in her 1987 book *Rough Edits*: "Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman/Special Effects."[19]

If, according to Mulvey's argument, the woman's body is turned into a fetish, Birnbaum's video raises the question of the agency of this woman-become-fetish. What appears as a traumatic threat to the fetishist may not be the same to the woman.[20] Without going into the detail of the psychoanalytic arguments,[21] it is not difficult to see that the excess that threatens the "phallic" desire of the fetishist is not necessarily threatening in the same way to women, insofar as their relation to the Oedipus complex is different. The excess may also be understood as an enjoyment (*jouissance*) that goes beyond both pleasure and desire and might be potentially transforming. By repeating the explosions, Birnbaum makes something insist that may otherwise be considered unrepresentable within the framework of commodity, fetish, and spectacle. The repetition of the explosion in *Technology/Transformation* recalls the blowing up of the luxurious desert mountain villa in Michelangelo Antonioni's film *Zabriskie Point* (1970), an explosion-as-spectacle repeated in slow motion to music by Pink Floyd that suggests the combination of destruction and enjoyment (which recalls the mixture of pleasure and pain in the Sublime as defined by Edmund Burke).[22] Filmed from a number of vantage points, the detonation is repeated at least thirteen times, with one silent scene of anticipation, before a further slow-motion sequence of exploded objects, again accompanied by Pink Floyd. We witness the destruction of the house and commodities of a corporate executive. We see a television blowing up, as well as an open refrigerator, a wardrobe of clothing, and a package carrying the word *Wonder* of Wonder Bread. The explosion sequence is preceded by a conference of businessmen discussing the exploitation of the desert, and the film ends with the sun sinking into the desert landscape, as if the act of destruction removed the house as an intrusion—subtracted it to return to the desert as a figure of the Real. The repetition of the explosion, and its slowing down to give it a sensation of weightlessness and floating, turns it into the figure of *jouissance*. The fetishistically architect-designed house on the hill has been exploded, its phallic unity shattered into myriad fragments. The explosion sequence cuts to the enigmatic smile of Daria Halprin, who has in its execution taken revenge for the shooting of a man, acted by Mark Frechette, with whom she made love at Zabriskie Point: the house belongs to an executive who wants to take her as a lover (and whom she no doubt considers to be a part of the "system" responsible for Mark's death). In both *Technology/Transformation* and *Zabriskie Point*, the explosions also need to be considered in historical terms; they are associated with Cold War fears of nuclear destruction but also with a liberating, revolutionary violence directed at the destruction of the commodity.[23]

The repetition in *Technology/Transformation* similarly has a double function. On the one hand, it shows the way in which the woman is trapped in dual roles as secretary and Wonder Woman, with the latter no less a trap than her secretarial subservience. On the other hand, it renders insistent the explosion that is the "special effect" of the transformation. In Freudian psychoanalysis, repetition is associated with the death drive, which Freud opposes to Eros. The former unbinds libido (as opposed to the binding of desire with the object and the narcissistic reinforcement of the ego), which becomes at once destructive and potentially liberating. Eros favors gestalt unities, the beautiful image, whereas Thanatos smashes the image. The moment of explosion in *Technology/Transformation* is thus a shattering of the image, which is at once destruction and the condition of possibility for transformation.[24] The video shows that, however frequently repeated, this transformation gets recuperated in the fetish that combines the technology of visuality with the objectification of the woman's body. The repetition brings this process itself to a campy excess that exposes a concealed truth of popular genre TV: it serves at once to acknowledge subversive and utopian energies and to recuperate them.

Technology/Transformation may be understood as taking the inverse approach to the same question Birnbaum tackles in *Chaired Anxieties*. The "anxiety" of the title is in the plural and may be considered as at least double. On the one hand, there is the anxiety of the woman trying to determine what acceptable posture to adopt—demure, submissive, concealing—in relation to the male look. But there is another anxiety involved that becomes more emphatic as Birnbaum, wearing a skirt, exposes her sex to the viewer—the anxiety provoked by the exposure of a "lack." This anxiety-provoking lack is, of course, precisely what the fetishist wishes to disavow and does so by overinvesting in an object or image.

What guards against this lack, while depending on it, is the Law manifest in language—which appears explicitly as writing in the credits. At the end of a film or TV program, the credits that roll have a dual role. At the mundane level, they convey information, a list of proper names that is usually mandated contractually and by union regulation. The appearance of the credits, then, is a manifestation of the law, including copyright, after the end of the film or program. Conventionally, in cinema and television, the credits create a frame referring to the symbolic dimension of language around the dimension of image. The words that take the role of credits in *Technology/Transformation* are not "outside" the work, however, but rather add another side to its appropriation; the "credit" sequence incorporates a pop song with rolling lyrics on-screen, and it occupies an ambiguous position on the margin. The disco music and karaoke-style words invite an identification that is no longer alongside an image. These elements highlight an attempt to indirectly represent sexual enjoyment in *Wonder Woman*—combined with the disco song at the end of a woman's voice singing of a woman's pleasure. That is, the words that are read are tied, through the song as it is heard, to the experience of the woman's body—as heard, not as a fetishized unity, as the object of the gaze. Unrepresentable in the imaginary (except as explosion), the manifestation of this dimension in language is like rhythm and alliteration, which Julia Kristeva associates with the expression of the subjective drives.[25] As the text scrolls, the words disintegrate into their component letters, including the series of O's that could be envisaged as circles around voids as the attempt to provide

Multiple-generation photocopy from the archive of Dara Birnbaum, used during the conception of Birnbaum's cover for the Zone Books edition of *Masochism*, by Gilles Deleuze and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch.

a visual equivalent to the sounds of ooos and orgasmic gasps. This is not to say that this potentially subversive enjoyment is not recuperated into the pop song as commodity, to which the subject is sutured by being invited to sing along.

THIS IS YOUR WONDER WOMAN
TALKING TO YOU
SAID I WANT TO TAKE YOU DOWN
SHOW YOU ALL THE POWERS THAT I POSSESS
AND OO-OU-U-UU-UUU-UUUU

IV

However transformed and adapted by editing and montage, appropriation necessarily implies a degree of assimilation to the economic and political context from which the material is taken. By the early 1980s, a time of increasing political conservatism combined with a burgeoning market, Birnbaum had turned to making videos out of material that she had shot herself in a working-class Italian American community, as if to assert both her independent agency as an artist and her acknowledgment of the politics of class and gender. Birnbaum's *Damnation of Faust Trilogy* comprises the videos *Evocation* (1983), *Will-o'-the-Wisp (A Deceitful Goal)* (1985), and *Charming Landscape* (1987). *Evocation* begins with a boy in a playground holding a swing, trying to look a little tough, inviting a girl to swing with him: "Georgeann, I'll take you up." "No, that's all right," she says. The motion then slows, and the image catches the boy's expression. Cut to a young woman in a room, hands on a

book; given the trilogy's title, one might make the viewer think of Goethe's Faust in his study, isolated from the townsfolk. The pages blow in the wind like leaves, and, together with pulsing electronic music in which synthesized grunts grow increasingly rapid and overlaid, this image gives the impression of a current of energy or emotion that is somehow alienated. A contrast is suggested between reading and action. The video then cuts to a young woman's face and a man at a drinking fountain, but a vertical wipe to the image of a wire-mesh fence suggests separation. The sequence evokes another borderline: that between childhood/adolescence and sexual self-awareness. We are then shown a sequence of shots of groups of boys and girls on both sides of this boundary. Sexualized interaction as a game—which we find in *Attack Piece*—is here set in relation to an architectural and social environment.

The sound track becomes like electronic bells as rooftops and sky appear, transitioning into a fan wipe back to the hand on the book, then to the woman in a room. The fan wipes continue into playground scenes, now showing two girls on a swing together. An effect of the inset is to juxtapose two temporalities, implying that we may be seeing a memory. The music becomes more driving as we are shown tenement buildings and two girls winding down the swing seat to give them a greater arc, followed by more fan wipes, now rhyming with the girls rising high together. The video then cuts between the playground and foliage, then pulls back to show first ferns on the edge of a pond, then the woman we saw reading in the room now outdoors shaking her head from side to side in the wind like a model on a photo shoot, which suggests both pleasure in nature—being outside the confines of her room and the enclosure of the yard—and an awareness of being filmed.

With *Damnation of Faust Trilogy*, Birnbaum shifts from using video to document performance (*Chaired Anxieties*) and reediting appropriated footage (*Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*) to using specially shot footage with effects and techniques, such as wipes, inserts, and slow-motion sequences, that, though with precedent in cinema (for example, Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* [1929]), are in technique and facility specific to video. Video is a medium that may as often be designed over a two-dimensional surface as edited through sequencing strips temporally. This different relation between space and time transforms the relation of the viewer to the image, which may be conceived in terms of its multiple spatial connections and vectors, as well as its narrative sequence. It is precisely these aspects that Jean-Luc Godard explored in a film he made three years before the appearance of Birnbaum's *Damnation of Faust Trilogy: Evocation*. The film *Sauve qui peut (La vie)* (Everyone for Themselves [Life], 1980), released with the English title *Slow Motion*,[70] marked Godard's return to 35 mm film after a decade of experimenting with video and producing TV programs with Anne-Marie Miéville. Indeed, one of the three central characters, called Godard, is a TV director, and one of the scenes takes place in a classroom with a blackboard on which is written: "Caïn et Abel/Cinéma et Vidéo." In the film, Godard introduced video techniques into cinema to further extend his survey of ways of thinking about the image, an investigation he had begun earlier with montage and text. The film is divided into chapters indicated by intertitles, lending the action an allegorical dimension (which is also reflected in the three-part structure of *Damnation of Faust Trilogy* and its allusion to a work of literature that is itself allegorical). In *Sauve qui peut*, Godard uses various editing techniques,

including juxtapositions of images and extreme slow motion, that are clearly influenced by his experience in video. The slow-motion sequences, in particular, transform the temporality of the image and invite the viewer to look at an image in a way that combines aspects of stillness and movement. On the one hand, the image can be scrutinized with something like the kind of attention with which one regards a photograph. In the context of the fractured narrative, we look for gestures and expressions exchanged between characters that might reveal some truth we might otherwise have missed. On the other hand, as moving image, the slow-motion sequences function like nodes between different trajectories in the film, drawing attention to movements and disclosures that might be missed or desired in the trajectory of the narrative beyond the image that is presented. These moments in Godard's film can be compared with the slow-motion moments in the first playground sequence of *Damnation of Faust Trilogy*, especially the sequences involving the swings. Instead of proceeding with a forward drive, the slowly moving image seems as if loaded with potential. Or, to put it another way, that which passes—the everyday, ordinary moment—is turned into an image as if by being folded back on itself, as a result of which the task of the viewer becomes the unfolding of it.

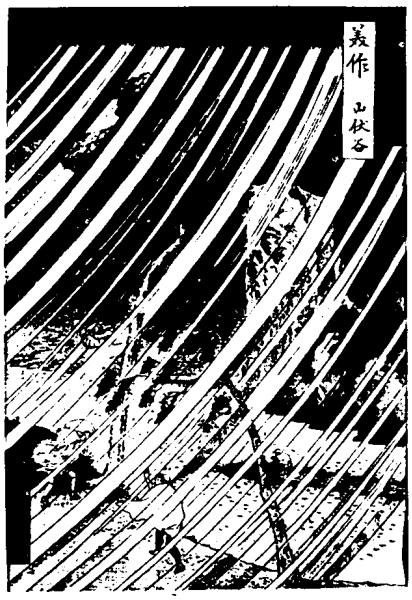
Before the release of *Sauve qui peut*, Godard made a "scenario" video, an essay film on his working methods and ideas for the larger movie, using a combination of text, voice-over, still and moving images, and sequences of footage repeated in order to explain how they work.[27] It begins with an IBM "golf ball" typewriter lettering over an image and the voice of Godard saying that he was writing on the typewriter "horizontally," as we do in Western writing, and was surprised by the "sudden appearance of the image" (*le surgissement de l'image*). But then, Godard says, he was intrigued by the "sudden vertical emergence" of an image, "like something rising to the surface," which made him "think of Japanese or Chinese writing—about pictograms, ideograms."[28] He concluded that he should be able to write both horizontally and vertically and not always horizontally first—"which is to say, death first." The cinematic devices of slow motion and superimposition may be interpreted as attempts to change or interrupt the "horizontal" movement—the linear movement of narrative that subordinates images—with other vectors, allowing both for the image to operate as an emergence or withdrawal and for "vertical" readings linking, for example, the different sequences in slow motion. What he wants to show is a "way of seeing," "using slow motion, either during superimposed images or a regular shot, to see if there is something to be seen, about which something can be said, and which might then alter the arc of the story." Godard associates these possibilities not with the image detached from writing but rather related to non-Western forms of writing, and by implication other ways of relating time and space. He speaks of an image "diving" in an opposite direction to the meaning and discusses characters in *Sauve qui peut* as images with different kinds of height, depth, motion, direction, vector, and speed: character becomes image, and image becomes event.

Stills from *Damnation of Faust Trilogy: Evocation*, 1983.

In her videos appropriating television footage, Dara Birnbaum had already broken with the "linear" narrative organization of moving images, through repetition and by means of various insets and wipes. In *Damnation of Faust*, where we also find the use of slow motion that Godard describes, this spatialization

of the image using fan wipes, as well as column-shaped and "window" insets to create complex temporal interrelationships, may be compared with a non-Western source, the Japanese woodblock print, and its descendent in comic books. This spatialization is further emphasized in the way that the work has been installed.[29] Monitors playing *Damnation of Faust* have been placed in relation to enlarged still images from the video, which were curved like Japanese woodblock fan-shaped prints.

In the *Scenario* video to *Sauve qui peut (La vie)*, Godard speaks of cinema as the organization of a system of images that won't necessarily take a horizontal form or relate to the human body. Similarly, in *Damnation of Faust*, Birnbaum explores a fundamental transformation of the experience and concept of the moving image; as with Godard, this transformation emerges out of the possibilities for editing opened up by video. While Godard, concerned with maintaining the perfection of the images achieved in cinema, applies these possibilities back to 35 mm film in *Sauve qui peut*, and thus restricts them, Birnbaum develops them within video itself. The themes of disappointment and loss in *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, which follow the potential contained in the adolescent energy of the first part, are counterpointed by the energy and multiple vectors of the subsequent images, including those in *Charming Landscape* of extracts from footage of political demonstrations. The use of fan wipes, recalling Japanese fan prints, suggests a break with the straightforward rectangular "window" model of representation that derives from Renaissance pictoriality and became the Western norm for four hundred years.[30] The fan and column wipes emphasize that the screen is a surface across which transformations take place rather than a window on to a pro-filmic scene, an event in front of the camera. The static nature of the architectural display in the work's installation, within which the viewer rather than the image moves, serves to emphasize by contrast the dynamism of the video. At the same time, the architectural dimension of the installation carries the viewer beyond the frame of the monitor and by implication prompts him or her to think about what is being seen beyond the way in which the media frames images, in a manner that extends into actual bodily life. In effect, the lesson of Minimalism—that the body absent from the object is the body of the viewer himself or herself experiencing space and time—is being applied to mediated images and sound.



Photocopies of Japanese comic books, c. 1983, from the archive of Dara Birnbaum.

In yet another affinity with Godard, Birnbaum works with the image in terms of different spatial and temporal trajectories, which concern different relationships to life conceived as energy and potential. In *Evocation*, the movement of the figures has a surging, upward dynamic; as with *Technology/Transformation*, it is a matter of transition, in this case from adolescence to adulthood. *Evocation* is full of hands-on physical activity, play, and flirtation. The second part, by contrast, conveys the experience of detachment and thoughtfulness resulting from disappointment and loss. While taking the title of the work as a whole from Hector Berlioz's opera *The Damnation of Faust*, the title of this part, *Will-o'-the-Wisp (A Deceitful Goal)*, alludes to a strange, hybrid scene in Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, a witches' Sabbath in the Harz mountains, which plays on the relation between enlightenment and rationalism on the one hand, and myth, fairy tale, and the erotic on the Other. Will-o'-the-wisps were believed to be spirits that led travelers to their destruction; they were explained as being the effect of phosphorescent swamp gas. The

idea of a mechanically produced figment of the imagination could be applied to image media. Birnbaum attaches the title to a part of her *Damnation of Faust Trilogy* that is concerned with the relation of sexual desire to distance. If in *Evocation* a woman takes the part of Faust with his books, here it is as if the female narrator takes the point of view of Marguerite, as she talks about the absence of her lover. Looking out the window, she talks about how you deform the past according to your desires, because you never really know what the other person in a relationship thinks. The affair was conducted at a distance—"there would be letters, and occasionally phone calls" that would "feed a kind of passion." She says, "Even if our being together had driven us apart, the distance would bring us together again." The relationship takes place in a bubble: "He had cut off his social life." It seems that it existed in the mode of the past and the future, without a present: "There were always more things to look forward to than things to regret. . . . That was only in the end." During this monologue, the image alternates between shots of the woman in her room looking out the window and inset frames showing young people in the street seen from above. *Evocation* is full of anticipation, combining a camera closely framing the children and young people with movements upward, whether in the exhilaration of the swing rising higher and higher or the upward pans of the building, all culminating in the roof, sky, and sense of free horizon of the coast: a journey to be embarked on. In *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, by contrast, a downward regard dominates. The window as a viewpoint of the subject onto the world, broken through by the fan and column wipes of the first part, is here reinstated as a perspective within the image, framed within the frame, now with a meaning not of making the world present but of separation and loss. The solitary woman in her room becomes a figure of melancholia.

Toward the end of part two of Goethe's drama, Faust believes that the spirits of the dead under Mephistopheles' command, who are digging his grave, are laborers working on a land-reclamation project that will benefit mankind. *Charming Landscape*, the third part of Birnbaum's *Damnation of Faust*, begins by showing that the housing and playground of the first part have become a construction site, which results in the dispersal of the community that had surrounded them. Insets show children playing in the ruins. A young woman's voice declares, "As you get older, and you think back, you realize that this really affected me. I'm trying to find where I stand." Another young woman's voice tells us that if people were in trouble, "you always helped them out." The destruction of the key site of their childhood calls forth a search for a ground, somewhere one can take one's stand, and the recollection of a lost community.

Stills from *Damnation of Faust Trilogy: Charming Landscape*, 1987.

The shot of the building site in *Charming Landscape* merges seamlessly into sequences of footage in black-and-white and color of political struggles since the 1960s: episodes from American civil rights protests in the South, the riots at the Chicago Democratic National Convention of 1968, May '68 in Paris—many of the sequences show violence on the body, such as people being beaten by police—and finally Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989, where soldiers or police are shown videotaping demonstrators, and the filmmakers themselves, until one of them puts his hand over the lens, effacing the scene.[11] This sequence recalls Chris Marker's extended retrospective reflection on the politics of the 1960s and 1970s, *A Grin without a Cat* (1993), reedited from *Le Fond de l'air est rouge* (1977). In Birnbaum's ending, state power is

Planning sketch for *Damnation of Faust (Installation)*, 1984.

shown to attempt to control the image and obliterate its oppositional use. During this sequence, the women talk about themselves in the past: "I was loud"; "I was free. . . . I was carefree"; "I see how much is still the same." At the end of the video we see the dedication: "For Pam and Georgeann, born May 1968 and February 1969." The whole of *Damnation of Faust Trilogy*, thus, may be understood as a gift for the two girls seen swinging together in the first part and later recalling the past against the destruction of the place where they grew up. Just as Robert Burton's seventeenth-century *Anatomy of Melancholy* ascends through levels of the affliction, from physical to sexual to religious melancholy, so the *Damnation of Faust Trilogy* seems to pass from the melancholy brought about by the loss of the sexual love object to an act of political love, which takes the form of a gift of memory—Mnemosyne—by the artist. It is a gift, from the artist, of political memory.

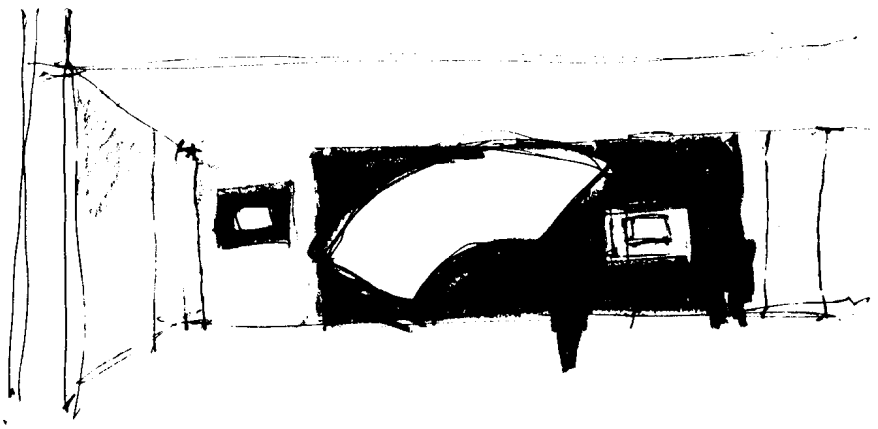
V

If *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* shows Woman spinning between the roles of subordinate and fetish, and *Damnation of Faust Trilogy* passes through expectation and melancholy to political love, *Erwartung/Expectancy* uses projections of hysterical speech and anamorphic imagery to "deframe" the image of Woman. While the work expresses extreme anxiety in its fragmented text, it presents the feminine as escaping the impasse of *Technology/Transformation*, in which no real transformation occurs. The fixity of options in *Technology/Transformation* is expressed through the appropriation of the image from television, while in *Damnation of Faust Trilogy* and *Erwartung*, the turn to an identification with the subjective position of the feminine as melancholy and hysteric involves allusion to opera: *Erwartung*, which translates to "expectancy," is based on the opera of this title by Arnold Schoenberg. The defining characteristic of opera is the voice as excess, and Birnbaum foreshadows the transition from the visual "sublime" to vocal excess with the titles accompanied by disco music in *Technology/Transformation. Damnation of Faust*

and *Erwartung* explore different relations to excess: in *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, the middle portion of *Faust*, what is stressed is detachment, distance, and the necessity to come to terms with loss; in the latter, it is rather the opposite: a proximity that becomes horrifying.

Birnbaum has made two different installations of *Erwartung*. Both involve projecting video of still images of a woman in white and fragments of the opera's libretto on to an enlargement of a sketch by Schoenberg for the set. One features an exterior projection in public space, the other an interior installation in a "black-box" gallery. While these variations change the relation of the image of Woman to light, both versions end with her disappearance: "What am I to do alone here? . . . In this endless life . . . in this dream without limits or colors . . . light will come for every one. . . . But me, alone in my darkness? Morning separates us." In the outdoor, architectural version, Birnbaum projects on the facade of the Kunsthalle Wien an enlargement of the Schoenberg watercolor, in which, Birnbaum says, "the forest seems to also form an ocular, centrifugal, center: an eye within the storm of absence and abandonment."[12] During the day, this is all that can be seen. As the daylight fades, the image of the woman emerges, in seventeen mise-en-scènes, one after the other with fragments of Marie Pappenheim's libretto as text in white over the image, only to disappear again with the coming of day, leaving behind the empty oculus of the forest.

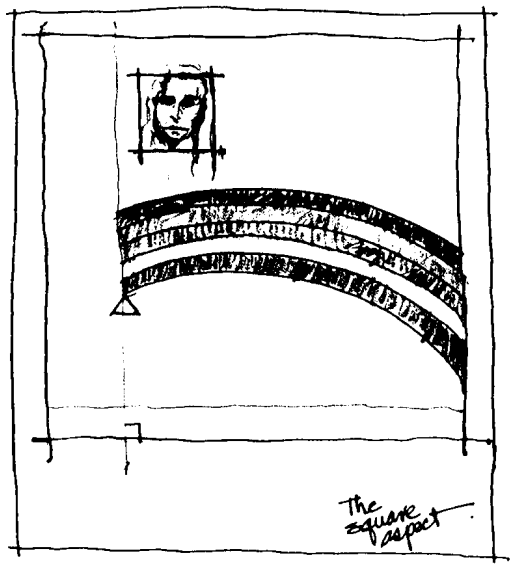
The version of *Erwartung* shown at the Jewish Museum, New York (mounted in 2003), was installed in a darkened room and accompanied by sound consisting of a manipulated extract from Schoenberg's opera. The move away from direct appropriation in *Damnation of Faust* freed Birnbaum from the subjection to the given that is a risk that accompanies the use without transformation of appropriated material. It introduced a transformative process while positing the subject as a melancholy one. *Erwartung* involves a return to appropriation, incorporating Schoenberg's watercolor stage design and Pappenheim's text, which in the process is freed from its status as libretto, subordinate to the music, and made the focus. These elements are combined with the images of a woman in a white dress—garb that alludes to both the mental patient and the operatic trope of the doomed woman. A DuraClear



Planning sketch for *Damnation of Faust* (Installation), 1984.

print of a drawing by Schoenberg for the stage set of the opera is mounted on four hanging Plexiglas screens, forming a single image. A video consisting of stills is projected onto the panels. The image of a woman is thus reflected both from the Plexiglas and from the wall behind, which embeds the image of the woman into the Schoenberg drawing. Text has been added into these images, which morph into one another by means of fade-ins and fade-outs. The woman comes to seem like a ghost, manifesting herself from different angles, a return of the repressed. What the gallery installation makes possible (different from the architectural projection in Vienna) is a transformation of a space involving projected images and words by a confrontation with an excess that is associated with, simultaneously, horror and enjoyment. The installation involves the viewer in this transformation as an embodied being, standing and moving around the space rather than seated and fixed in place—and therefore to a degree disembodied—as in a typical opera performance. Further, images surround the viewer, as the central projection is reflected onto Plexiglas from a ninety-degree angle. This side projection distorts the images into anamorphic forms. If the traditional setup of perspective offers a unified point of view, which could be taken to coincide with the position of camera and projector in cinema, Birnbaum has thrown this into question in the way she installed and edited her previous videos. In *Erwartung*, subject positions are rendered ex-centric and multiplied, triggering the distortions that might be associated with fantasy and hysterical delusion.

Damnation of Faust, as we have seen, is explicitly concerned with separation and loss. *Erwartung* takes this concern further, into a confrontation with death: the woman stumbles over what seems to be the corpse of her lover, which is at once an objectification and a delimitation of the dimension of death. This death is not, however, that of a heroic "being-towards-death"[53] but rather death as the other side of what Julia Kristeva calls the "semiotic chora," in which drive has the chance of finding "voice" in the symbolic.[54] The installation creates a choric space that envelops the viewer and in which image and text are multiplied, dissolved, and re-formed. In a sense, Birnbaum frees Pappenheim's text from the traditionally patriarchal genre of opera, dependent on the male composer and maestro-conductor, while also reclaiming it as "chora": a maternal space in which fusion and separation, drive and the possibility of its forming and symbolization, meet. This dimension had always been present in opera's emphasis on the materiality of the voice independent of its linguistic content.[55]



Untitled drawing from a sketchbook, c. 1970s.

The explosion that appears in *Technology/Transformation* stands in contrast to the fragmentation of language by Pappenheim in her text for *Erwartung*. The explosion presents an unrepresentable power or drive; the transformation to which it gives rise nevertheless remains a symbol of the nation in red, white, and blue, and its shattering potential is disavowed in the fetish. Without denying the possibility and use of female fetishism, Wonder Woman is a figure split between being both an object of identification for women (identification with her agency, at the cost of "being" the phallus) and an object of disavowal of the lack of maternal phallus in men: placating castration anxiety through the suspension of the fetish, she is a repudiation of a threatening sexual

difference, associated historically with the rise of feminism during the time of the *Wonder Woman* series. In relation to chora, fetishism acts as the disavowal of the maternal dimension of symbolization. The fragmentation of language—specifically of syntax—in *Erwartung* opens the possibility of another speech, of which rhythm, syncope, and tone are essential elements.[56] A parallel movement occurs in the image that concerns not just its gestalt but also its ground or matrix.[57] The mirror of *Technology/Transformation* becomes a screen. This screen not only implies a behind-of-the-image—that is to say, the impression that there is something other covered by the image—but also generates an anamorphic projection and perception. In *Erwartung*'s gallery installation, the images—in particular, the images of the woman—are multiplied by Plexiglas screens and projected onto the walls at an angle, which means that the images are distorted when viewed straight on and corrected when seen from an angle. In their distortion, they approach the character of a stain. A stain is something that is in a sense always too close however far away it is. In relation to anxiety, it functions as a phobic object, like a spider for those who are averse to it: rather than objectifying and distancing the anxiety—a distance that allows the temporary transformation of anxiety into fear—the stain marks the place of a nonobject that threatens to spread and increase the more the subject tries to erase it. As in fetishism, the subject is threatened, but this time the threat is not to the ego from a lack; rather, the threat is to the being of the subject from an excess, from something—both pleasure and horror—that comes too close, that in the darkness of the forest cannot be distinguished. The woman sees what she thinks is a bench until she stumbles over it, at which point she believes it is the corpse of her lover. This shift from a possibly illusory vision to a tactile encounter, with its collapse of distance, does not necessarily resolve the delusional character of the woman's experience, if she is in a state of hysteria and there is no perspective offered outside her own.

As noted, in the gallery version of *Erwartung*, the projected images partially bounce off the Plexiglas screens onto the side walls, and the angle of reflection causes the images to distort when seen from directly in front of the wall. Images bounce from the Plexiglas screens as mirror images onto the walls and floor and reflect back from the screens in corrected form. The imagery and text are thus manifest as reflection, in anamorphosis, and then as second reflection. This doubled effect of entrapment and dispersal or excess becomes a homology to the experience of the female subject of the opera. This operation of anamorphosis performed on the image implies that something—some "thing"—that is not otherwise represented becomes manifest when seen from an oblique angle, when the subject is displaced from its centered position in relation to the vanishing point of traditional perspective (which originated, of course, in experimentation with a mirror). The effect undermines the authority of the central viewpoint of perspectival painting, and the stage sets based on it, which developed in the sixteenth century—that is, the point in relation to which all lines converge and from which space and the truth of representation are organized and the image coincides with its "readability."[58] The suggestion is that otherness can only be encountered anamorphically, which also means in relation to an edge, and at the point where the image, seen at an extreme angle, vanishes.[59] It is as if we are on the point of passing through the surface of the image, to a place where distance and the distinction between inside and outside collapse, and something unspeakable and unrepresentable might be encountered.

Erwartung/Expectancy, 1995/2001, installation view at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2002.

Marie Pappenheim drew on the language of hysteria for her libretto for *Erwartung*. Peter Brooks argues that a convergence of melodrama and psychoanalysis occurs around the hystericized body, which is typically a woman's body.[10] According to descriptions and case histories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the hysteric's body speaks in physical symptoms like tics, paralyses, and coughs. Brooks argues that opera combines two apparently contradictory tendencies of melodrama: the extreme embodiment of meaning and lyric self-expression (Brooks, p. 121). It involves spectacularization of both body and voice, to the point of an acting out of emotion, "not merely of imitating affect but of reproducing it before our eyes" (Brooks, p. 123). This amounts to what Freud in "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" describes as acting out where remembering takes the form of a repetition.[11] But "the hystericized voice does something that the hystericized body cannot do":

> *The aria offers us at once the symptoms of the hysterical impasse and the working-through of the impasse. Voice unleashes passion, and thereby brings . . . the solution, in the lyrical assumption of self and situation.* (Brooks, p. 125)

In other words, Brooks finds opera to be both symptom and "talking cure" (p. 126). This conception of opera as the resolution of an impasse is precisely what Susan McClary questions in her discussion "Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen."[12] She traces the way that in opera the monstrousness of the diva as "madwoman," which manifests itself musically

through repetitive, ornamental, or chromatic excess, is controlled by "normative procedures representing reason," which "are erected around them to serve as protective frames preventing 'contagion'" (McClary, p. 81). She compares this operatic manifestation of the feminine with famous paintings celebrating psychiatry, Tony Robert-Fleury's *Pinel Freeing the Insane* (1876) and André Brouillet's *A Clinical Lesson with Doctor Charcot at the Salpêtrière*, (1887), in which the madwoman is exhibited by the male doctor as a sexually titillating display: "The frame of masculine rationality is constantly visible to guard against the male-constructed (or framed) image of the madwoman" (McClary, p. 85). Hysterics became enigmatic and troubling objects of visual scrutiny in the name of medical science, as acutely demonstrated by the photographic "iconography" produced in Paris at the psychiatric hospital of La Salpêtrière under the direction of Jean-Martin Charcot.[43] For some months during 1885–86, Freud studied with Charcot and later, together with Joseph Breuer, founded the practice of psychoanalysis, thereby breaking with Charcot's specular and physical relation of doctor to female hysteric and turning instead to an aural relation—namely, that of the doctor listening to the patient. The first of the founding case histories, published in *Studies in Hysteria* in 1895 under the title "Fräulein Anna O.,"[44] concerned Bertha Pappenheim, who should be credited as the co-creator of the "talking cure." Pappenheim, a relative of the young medical student who wrote the libretto for *Erwartung*, became a leading feminist and social worker. Specular objectivation and the symptomatic character of the speech of the so-called hysteric and its relation to women's writing have since been a crux of feminist theory, as well as sources of inspiration to artists, writers, and composers.[45]

André Brouillet, *A Clinical Lesson with Doctor Charcot at the Salpêtrière*, 1887.

Music differs from visual representation in both seeming to manifest interiority and collapsing the defensive distance of perspectival visual representation. It thereby increases the risk of contagion, which means that—at least in traditional opera—the frame has to be enacted all the more dramatically (McClary, p. 86). McClary argues that in the work of Richard Strauss—especially in "the monstrosity of Salome's sexual and chromatic transgressions"—"the frame itself has lost its hegemonic authority" (McClary, p. 100). What is happening is an assimilation of the avant-garde of the transgression and excess represented by the operatic madwoman—"the signs of their madness are usually among the favorite techniques of the avant-garde" (McClary, p. 101). This act culminates the appropriation of feminine creative attributes by the male "genius" in Romanticism.[46]

In Marie Pappenheim's libretto, the masculine "frame" has turned into a corpse, possibly murdered by the madwoman, and in Schoenberg's music any possibility of tonal resolution or framing has disappeared into a total chromatism. If opera's "frame" has disappeared, the traditional binary has not. In his 1911 treatise *Theory of Harmony*, Schoenberg "affiliates himself with what had always been defined as the 'feminine' side of all the binary oppositions governing tonal procedures and narratives," while at the same time avoiding mapping the binary onto gender by aligning his atonality with "resistance against oppressive political authority" and "the properly masculine business of revolution" (McClary, p. 105). McClary writes:

> *Not surprisingly, his metaphorical surrogate in* Erwartung*—the piece in which he committed his supreme violation, his break with tonality—was once again the*

> *figure of the madwoman. . . . Schoenberg's celebrated "emancipation of the dissonance" is self-consciously presented as the liberation of the female lunatic, of the feminine moment of desire and dread that had driven most nineteenth-century narratives. . . . If he managed in his theoretical writings to construct transgression as a heroic deed, his artistic enactment of that transgression in* Erwartung *betrays his inability to dismiss or transcend traditional binarisms and their gendered associations.* (McClary, p. 107)

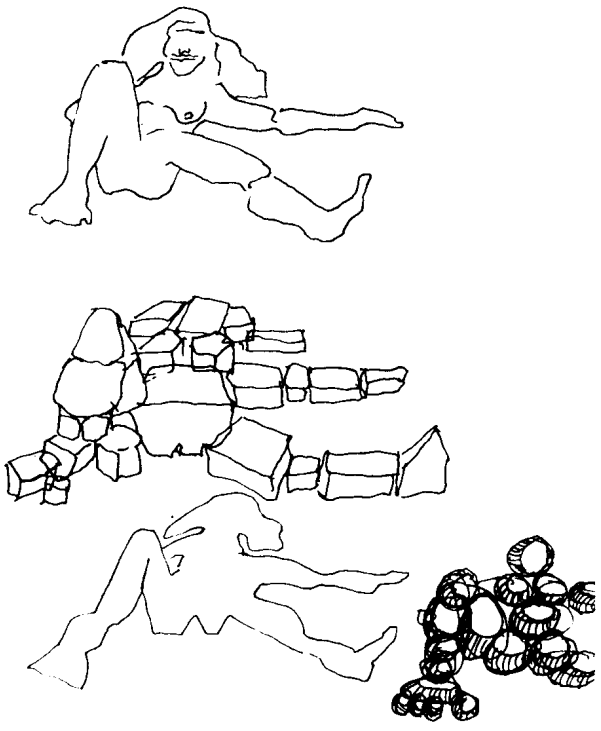
After apparently collapsing the rational frame in *Erwartung*, through both atonal chromatism and his use of Pappenheim's narrative, Schoenberg creates an entirely rationalized system in the twelve-tone scale, but he continues the identification of the madwoman with genius and the avant-garde. The probable murder by the woman of her lover is indicative of the dispensing with the "masculine" frame around "feminine" madness. Atonality is then identified with this feminine excess, despite being recuperated by Schoenberg in his writing for the "masculine" project of revolution.

Birnbaum's *Erwartung* is thus the reappropriation of the appropriation by Schoenberg of the "madwoman"—and if the video monitor of *Chaired Anxieties* is a framing of her own performance of insanity then the later installation could perhaps be understood as what has been described as "de-framing." In the third and final part of *Chaired Anxieties*, titled *Addendum: Autism*, Birnbaum presents herself as a madwoman—hair disheveled, animal movements, exposing her sex unself-consciously (which compares to the display of the hysteric in the painting of Charcot). The monitor acts as the "frame," like the window with bars at the seventeenth-century madhouse where lunatics were a public spectacle, to keep the excess within bounds—bounds determined by patriarchy—and to keep the contagion from spreading. It is precisely on the frame, the edge, the side walls, that Birnbaum works in her version of *Erwartung*. Indeed, her installation could be seen as an act not so much collapsing or transgressing the frame as what in cinematic theory has been called "deframing." Pascal Bonitzer, in his essay "Décadrages" (Deframings),[4] complicates the way film theory of the early 1970s drew on the theories based on Renaissance perspective by suggesting that something happens in cinema that is distinct from the positioning of the spectator by perspective in painting, and that this has something to do with the "movement" characteristic of cinema (Bonitzer, p. 81). Bonitzer contrasts the centrifugal composition of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) with an emptying out or effect of the void in what he calls *décadrage*. In *décadrage*, something is missing from within the frame; for example, we see the look of horror in the face of the woman, but we don't see its cause. Whereas this would remain enigmatic in a painting or a photograph, movement allows cinema to resorb and deploy the effects of the void by means of reframings. By suggesting that continuity in cinematic editing is a form of reparation (Bonitzer, p. 82), Bonitzer implies a traumatic dimension to the deframing void within the frame. The solution of continuity, Bonitzer argues, is double, scenographic and narrative, and these do not coincide. Certain filmmakers—Bonitzer names Antonioni, Straub-Huillet, and Marguerite Duras—introduce a nonnarrative, that is to say scenographic, suspense by means of strange and frustrating framings (Bonitzer, p. 83). This "lacunary scenography" prevents the resolution of the fragments into a total image and is thus opposed to the dialectical cinema established through montage by Sergei Eisenstein. In this nonnarrative suspension, a tension perdures

from shot to shot that the narrative does not and cannot resolve. Bonitzer claims that in the center of the image, where in the classical tableau one would expect to find a symbolic presence, in *décadrage* one finds "nothing," even if this "nothing" or void is not—and here he refers to Godard—the loss of classical unity (and therefore its negative replacement or recentering) but rather a multiplier, the generator of new configurations. It is precisely this connection of deframings with the generation of new configurations that we find in Birnbaum's gallery installation of *Erwartung*. This siting, like the nightclub screenings of her appropriated TV videos and the architectural and pictorial installations of *Damnation of Faust*, represents the effort to exceed the frame.

As installation using image projection to rework an opera, *Erwartung* creates a topology that has characteristics of both deframing cinema and what has been called "postdramatic theater." Hans-Thies Lehmann argues for a theater that combines the characteristics of Kristeva's semiotic chora with the presence of text as an interruption of the self-sufficient imagery of the stage.[48] Language "loses its immanent teleological temporality and orientation towards meaning and becomes like an *exhibited object*" (emphasis in original, Lehmann, p. 147). He argues that such theater marks a shift from a "dramatic" space that is metaphorical and symbolic and that functions like a mirror of the world of the audience that is separated from it to a "postdramatic" space that is rather a "metonymic space," which instead of producing another symbolic world is in continuity with the real space of the theater (Lehmann, p. 149). Effectively, this deframed theatrical space invites the audience to engage in an energetic, bodily relationship with the performance. In Birnbaum's *Erwartung*, too, we find an interruption of the image through the presence of text and, by means of the anamorphic projection, the incitement of a bodily relationship with a mobile viewer. Yet, unlike in theater, since Birnbaum is using projected image, the actual body of the performer is absent—or, perhaps more accurately, present as absence, at once multiplied as image and set in relation to the void provoked by "deframing."

Transformation is a central concern of *Technology/Transformation*, *Damnation of Faust*, and *Erwartung*. In each case, a blockage is confronted: the media image in the first, the loss of a home ground owing to the capitalization of property in the second, and the stereotypical framing of the "madwoman" in the third. The energetic dynamic of the image finds its resource in feminine *jouissance*, the potential of which is considered in relation to the political situation. *Technology/Transformation* is dynamic but pessimistic, since the ecstatic is recuperated into fetish and commodified mass culture, practically without remainder. *Damnation of Faust* is melancholy but has an ending that implies the resource for future social transformation contained in political memory. *Erwartung*, through its extension of projection into reflection and anamorphosis, hints at the possibility of breaking the frame, with the release of energy that would result. The models according to which the visual artwork is conceived have



Untitled drawing from a sketchbook, c. early 1970s.

also changed: from the appropriated image with its roots in collage and the readymade to a recovery of opera, the concept of an art for a collective audience in an age when audiences have become fragmented. Whatever its nineteenth-century limitations as a bourgeois art form, to invoke opera now is to recall and to anticipate the possibility of a political community.

VI

At the center of Maurice Blanchot's *récit The Madness of the Day*, a favorite of Birnbaum's, the narrator is rendered blind by the light.[17] This event marks a kind of hinge between what is possible to narrate and what exceeds all narration. In addition to the experience of a blinding light, an excess of lucidity on a knife edge with madness, the story contains the figure of a revolving door. It thus hints for us at the connections between Birnbaum's different works, from the spinning of Wonder Woman in *Technology/Transformation* through the encounter with the everyday and the experience of loss in *Damnation of Faust* to the disappearance of the image in a blinding light in *Erwartung*. Blanchot represents the Law in the form of an ophthalmologist and a doctor—the medical gaze—but, in addition, there appears in the story a female personification of Justice, who asks for responsibility to singularity. Thus Justice has to do with an accord with the event as singularity that interrupts the dominion of the Law. In 1999, Birnbaum produced a political poster that showed a cartoon image of a woman against an explosion with the words "end violence celebrate peace now": it is ambiguous whether the woman has been blown away by the explosion or is dancing.

Poster designed by Dara Birnbaum, 1999.

1 The other participants in *Attack Piece* included Dan Graham, David Askevold, Ian Murray, Cyne Cobb, and Christina Ritchie.

2 For the reception of video in terms of immediacy, see William Kaizen, "Live on Tape: Video, Liveness and the Immediate," in *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), pp. 258–72.

3 Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," in *New Artists Video: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978), p. 179; reprinted from *October* 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 51–64.

4 Dara Birnbaum, "Transformation/Technology" (1987) project notes, Dara Birnbaum Archive. In this book, p. 97.

5 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

6 See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* 21, no. 1 (September 1982), pp. 43–56.

7 See Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979), pp. 75–88; reprinted with variations, including a discussion of work by Cindy Sherman, who was not in the "Pictures" exhibition, in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (Boston: David R. Godine, 1984), pp. 175–87. For a discussion of appropriation art in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s, see my *Richard Prince: Untitled (couple)* (London: Afterall Books, 2006).

8 See Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures," pp. 43–56.

9 Dara Birnbaum, *Rough Edits: Popular Image Video, Works 1977–1980*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1987), p. 12.

10 See "Do It 2: Cory Arcangel and Dara Birnbaum in Conversation," *Artforum* 47, no. 7 (March 2009), pp. 191–98.

11 The gallery was Nova Gallery. For a discussion of Jeff Wall and Marcel Duchamp, see my "Towards the Reinvigoration of the 'Western Tableau': Some Notes on Jeff Wall and Duchamp," *Oxford Art Journal* 30, no. 1 (2007), pp. 81–100.

12 For an interpretation of the readymade and appropriation more in line with Birnbaum's approach, see John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007).

13 According to Jacques Lacan, while the pleasure of the Freudian pleasure principle is limited by its relation to reality, *jouissance* (which is usually translated as "enjoyment") is "beyond the pleasure principle" in that it is excessive (a "plus" not a lack), a transgression of limits and refusal of oneness. Rather than involving a simple experience of pleasure, it involves pain or suffering, which may be mixed with pleasure, and is the encounter with the impossibility of a full satisfaction (therefore it is not the orgasm). Rather than being in relation to the limits of reality, it is in relation—an impossible because unmediated relation and therefore traumatic—to what Lacan calls the Real, which is the dimension of the drives. *Jouissance* is prohibited by the Oedipal Law of the Father, which calls for symbolic substitution (desire) rather than a relation to the Real that refuses substitution (*jouissance*). The *jouissance* excluded by the Symbolic Order and that is not caught in the chain of signifiers of language appears as what Lacan calls "object a," a piece of the Real that manifests itself in the imaginary (in the image conceived as a screen) as a hole that is covered or masked, for example, by a stain or anamorphic figure; in the field of the visible this is the place of the gaze (see Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* [London: Penguin, 1977], pp. 105–16). In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX: Encore. On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972–73*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), Lacan developed the distinction between "phallic" and "feminine" *jouissance*. Phallic *jouissance* is dominated by the impossibility of establishing the sexual relationship as a One or unity, so enjoyment is related not to the (body of) the Other but to the oneness of the phallus. According to Lacan's reading of women mystics, women (and some men) have access to a specifically feminine *jouissance* "beyond the phallus" (p. 69). (Lacan interprets the idea of the Other as God as based on feminine *jouissance*.) This is because, given that their relationship to the Oedipus complex is different from that of men, women's being is not entirely subsumed to the phallus. However, because access to the Symbolic Order depends on symbolic castration—acceptance of the Law of the Father—this feminine *jouissance* is for Lacan "ineffable" (p. 21), unsayable and unsymbolizable. Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic dimension of language as expression of the drives, and the chora, would question this unsymbolizability of feminine *jouissance*. For discussions of jouissance in Lacan, see the entry in Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Néstor Braunstain, "Desire and Jouissance in Lacanian Teachings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 102–15.

14 The metallic bra cones used for Wonder Woman in the TV series are similar to—and may derive from—a dominatrix costume. See the undated photograph from Paula Klaw/Movie Star News, "Cone bra and *cache-sexe*," in Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex, and Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 135. Bras with circular, whirlpool cups were popular in the 1940s and 1950s (p. 136).

15 See Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 161–62.

16 Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *Penguin Freud Reader*, ed. Adam Phillips (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 91.

17 Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 74.

18 Dana Polan, "Stock Responses: The Spectacle of the Symbolic in *Summer Stock*," *Discourse* 10 (Fall/Winter 1987–88), p. 124, quoted in Laura Mulvey, "Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture," *October* 65 (Summer 1993), pp. 5–6.

19 See Birnbaum, *Rough Edits*, pp. 32–33.

20 This is not to exclude the possibility of *female fetishism*. See Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen, *Female Fetishism* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

21 See Parveen Adams, "Of Female Bondage," in *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 27–48.

22 See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, part 5, sects. 1–8 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958).

23 An artwork that deals with the historicity of the explosion is Johan Grimonprez's film *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997), on explosions in relation to the Palestine Liberation Organization airplane hijackings of the 1960s. Today, by contrast, explosions have come to be associated with car bombs and "terrorist" suicide attacks, while the violence of the State directed toward those designated as enemies is hidden behind the mimicry of computer-game type simulations, as in the first Gulf War.

24 For an account of the shattering of the gestalt of the image in terms of the effect of the death drive in disintegrating the ego, see the excellent discussion in Richard Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 150–54.

25 See Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 90–136.

26 The title for the U.S. release was *Every Man for Himself*; for the U.K., *Slow Motion*.

27 *Scenario de "Sauve qui peut (la vie)"* (1979) is included as an extra in the 2006 Artificial Eye DVD release of *Slow Motion* (1980). This film, together with the "scenarios" for other films that followed, was to lead into Godard's reflection from the point of view of video on the history of cinema in *Histoire(s) du Cinema* (1988–98).

28 This translation is slightly modified from the subtitles.

29 See illustrations of installations of *Damnation of Faust* at the Whitney Biennial (1985) and Long Beach Museum of Art (1986). See also the catalogue *Dara Birnbaum* (Valencia: IVAM Centre Del Carme, 1990), pp. 8–10, 48–49.

30 See Gérard Wajcman, *Fenêtre: chroniques du regard et de l'intime* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2004), and Paul Chan, "On Light as Midnight and Noon," in *Paul Chan: The 7 Lights* (Cologne: Walther König, in association with Serpentine Gallery, London, and New Museum, New York, 2007), pp. 114–20.

31 In 1990 Birnbaum made a five-channel video installation work *Tiananmen Square: Break-In Transmission*.

32 Dara Birnbaum, project notes for *Erwartung/ Expectancy*, 1995.

33 Death as it figures in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 279–311.

34 See Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language," pp. 93–95.

35 See Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 179 89.

36 See Catherine Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

37 See Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. Press, 2006).

38 See Mary Ann Doane, "Remembering Women: Psychical and Historical Constructions in Film Theory," in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 51; see also Judith Barry, *Public Fantasy: An Anthology of Critical Essays, Fictions and Project Descriptions*, ed. Iwona Blazwick (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1991), p. 21.

39 This is precisely the case with Holbein the Younger's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533), which may have been originally hung near an exit from the room, so that as the viewer passes by the picture, he or she sees the "stain" in its center turn into the image of a skull. This painting is used as an example in the discussion of the implications of anamorphosis for the relation of the object "gaze" to the subject in Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 67–119.

40 Peter Brooks, "Body and Voice in Melodrama and Opera," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 118–34, 120). Hereafter cited in text.

41 Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol.12, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 147 56.

42 Susan McClary, "Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen," chap. 4 in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 80–111. Hereafter cited in text.

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